

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

February 20, 1963

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Subject: Analysis of Reports on the Venezuelan Ship Incident

The Department of State and the Department of Defense furnished a chronology of events in the handling of the Venezuelan ship incident on 14 February. Based on these statements, the following seem to be a fair appraisal of what occurred. Certain steps that could be taken to improve our handling of any similar incidents in the future are suggested by these reports.

(1) The watch officers during the night took what would normally be considered appropriate action. In the State Department, the Operations Center telephoned the Venezuelan desk officer, Mr. Moskowitz, and communicated with Navy Flag Plot, who had already been interested because of the press reports. The Operations Center also checked with the CIA duty officer.

In this instance, there appears to be a lack of appreciation of the political implications involved; it probably would have been appropriate to move this further up the line in the State Department. Additionally, the Navy duty officer should not have been influenced so heavily by the State Department suggestion of "wait until the Venezuelans ask us for something."

(2) About 5:45 a.m., the Navy Flag Plot reported to the State Department Operations Center that the Navy had a DF fix on the missing vessel.

(3) At 6:15 a.m. the CNO duty captain informed Admiral Ricketts of the fix on the missing ship, who directed that it be passed by telephone to the Naval Attaché in Caracas.

(4) At 8:00 a.m. the Secretary of the Navy, Under Secretary Fay and Admiral Ricketts were briefed on the matter. At about 9:30 a.m., Vice Admiral Grinn telephoned Admiral Denison and discussed the matter of

OSD REVIEW COMPLETED

NSC review(s) completed.

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locating the ship; and at about 10 o'clock the CNO duty captain was advised that a request from the State Department (indicating that the Venezuelan Government was going to request assistance in locating the ship) would be forthcoming.

(5) The first decision in the State Department was made at 9:15 a.m., when Assistant Secretary Martin decided to institute some action, seeking a request from the Venezuelan Government for the U. S. Navy to search for the Venezuelan ship. The State Department made no formal request for the Navy to take action until 10:35 a.m., when Mr. Allen of the State Department called General Enemark in the Department of Defense. From that point on, as the Venezuelans made a formal request to the State Department (around 11:30 a.m.), the responses were orderly and timely in the Department of Defense. It seems, however, that the senior officer in the State Department was not in touch with the senior officer in the Defense Department until after the President called Acting Secretary Ball, which was 12:55 p.m.

(6) Checking by telephone with the Director of the Joint Staff, we find that General Enemark from DOD/ISA was in touch with the Joint Staff about 10:00 a.m., asking what they were doing about the problem of the ship. It was much later in the morning when General Enemark finally called and said that the State Department had requested that we search and find and gain control of the ship. The Director of the Joint Staff referred the action to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Next they called Mr. Nitze, who took it up with Secretary McNamara. The time of this is not clear, but finally at 1:43 p.m. the message went out, which was later amended by various actions.

(7) The Navy's own action resulted in patrol planes being launched about 12 noon to begin a search.

(8) From 2:00 o'clock in the afternoon on, the action was really the changing of orders to commanders, whether to board or not to board, whether to use force or not to use force, etc.

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20 February 1963

MEMORANDUM FOR:

Secretary of State
Secretary of Defense
Director, Central Intelligence Agency

Subject: ANZOATEGUI Affair

I requested and am in receipt of summaries from the Department of State and the Department of Defense of what is taken in the initial steps following the report of seizure of the Venezuelan ship ANZOATEGUI. I have had members of my staff analyze these reports.

This incident indicates certain weak areas which could prove embarrassing to this government. I therefore wish to make you aware of my conclusions in this incident:

(1) The State Department did not indicate an alertness as to the political importance of this highjacked ship. From 6:00 a. m. on, more interest and more study of the situation should have been precipitated. The State Department was too slow in getting from the Venezuelan desk to Assistant Secretary Martin to the Acting Secretary of State and, eventually, to the White House with a line of bidding on this problem. In fact, Secretary Rusk in San Francisco was more alert to the possibility and had called the State Department an early as 10:00 a.m., which is only 7:30 a. m. out in San Francisco.

(2) The Navy response and assumption of responsibility should have been more prompt. Even though their action officials were somewhat discouraged in assuming their operational responsibilities (by the State Department saying 'let's wait to see what the Venezuelans want'), the Navy should have been more alert to the political implications of the matter and the responsibilities they could anticipate. Again, in the Defense Department, officials were too slow in getting the attention of the top decision makers directed to the matter of the ship. (Allowing two hours,

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from 6:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m., for estimates, decision and issuance of orders, it appears that the Government lost from three to four hours in instituting the search for the hijacked ship. The decision to search could have been made based solely on political expediency, without waiting for the political decision of what action to take when we had forces confronting the Venezuelan ship.

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(3) The watch office operations of your department should be tightened up. There seems to be a hesitancy on the part of watch officers all along the line to wake up the senior decision-making officials. Since they do not have the authority to initiate action like this themselves, this frequently must be their course of action.

(4) The State Department and the Defense Department should carefully examine their own procedures in order that information and requests for decisions rise to the top of the departments more rapidly. Most of this stall was because a desk officer did not move promptly to an assistant secretary who did not move promptly to the Acting Secretary; and in the Defense Department the intelligence people and the operations people did not press this problem to the decision-making echelon fast enough. There is no indication in the two reports that the Joint Chiefs of Staff were alerted to this problem at an early stage.

(5) Throughout this incident, there appears to have been a tendency to sit and wait to be told -- to be requested to make a recommendation. I would prefer that initiative be shown in anticipating the requirement -- that such situations be assessed and recommendations developed, even negative ones, before they are requested.

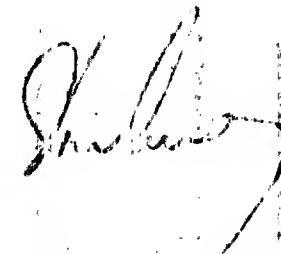
(6) It would indeed have been a political calamity and most embarrassing to both Venezuela and the United States had this ship steamed into Cuba without action or knowledge on our part when we are expending such an effort in the surveillance of that island. It is significant that the political implications were either overlooked or downgraded all along the line, starting with the watch officers, until late in the morning.

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I have gone into this matter in some detail, not because I desire any punitive action taken -- which I do not want -- but because I believe we can use the lessons to improve our response in future situations. I believe it would be helpful if the attached analysis and this memorandum could be shown to all the officers who handled this particular situation. Further, I believe our experience can be used as a basis for setting up improved instructions to the watch officers, as well as establishing a better flow of analysis and recommendation throughout the departments concerned.

Additionally, it would probably be beneficial if the Secretary of Defense could give the Department of the Army and the Department of the Air Force information copies of this memorandum in order that they might look into their operations with similar objectives in mind.

A handwritten signature, possibly 'Shaw', is written in cursive across the middle of the page.

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THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

WASHINGTON

27 FEB 1963

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Dear John:

Reference is made to the President's memorandum of 20 February 1963 on the Anzoategui Affair wherein he expressed areas of concern in the handling of such cases.

Within the Department of Defense, the National Military Command Center (NMCC) is the center of military operations. All information which could result in the use of military force should be referred to that center which has procedures for informing the top level DOD decision making officials and for notifying the White House Situation Center.

Although your agency may not have been directly involved in this particular affair, it has indicated that our procedures are not air-tight. However, I am informed that your Operations Center has reached an agreement with the NMCC personnel on the procedures to be followed in passing information of interest to our agencies and the White House which might require military action. I believe that if our centers follow these procedures, we can prevent a recurrence of instances such as the one cited by the President and increase the efficiency of our operations.

Sincerely,

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Mr. John A. McCone
Director, Central Intelligence Agency

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